from the Author.

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IDEAS

ON

THE OPERA,

OFFERED

TO

THE SUBSCRIBERS, CREDITORS,

AND

AMATEURS OF THAT THEATRE.

BY MR. LE TEXIER.

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH.

Still pleas'd to praise, yet not afraid to blame.

POPE.

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To the SUBSCRIBERS, CREDITORS, and AMATEURS of the Opera.

LADIES and GENTLEMEN,

I HOPE you will kindly receive the homage of the following Ideas. To be useful and agreeable has been my chief design. If one of you may hereafter say, "I owe to this essay," the one "an entertainment of a new kind," the other "securities for my interests," and the public "some new inventions for pleasure;" I shall think myself amply repaid.

I have the honour to be, with respect,

LADIES and GENTLEMEN,

Your most obedient

Humble Servant,

LE TEXIER.

IDEAS ON THE OPERA.

OF all the things which have been imagined to create that delicious sensation so eagerly pursued and so rarely felt, *pleasure*, there is none perhaps now existing so ingenious in every point as that kind of entertainment called *Opera*; not certainly that cold lifeless thing which has been hitherto considered as our fashionable pastime, but such as an Opera might be, if consistent with the design of that grand invention. To produce this truly attractive *Opera*, Poetry, Music, Dancing, and Painting have united their charms, and by this happy union our senses are delighted, our hearts seduced, and our minds, as by enchantment, amazed: but to bring forth that fascination of the mind, the reverse should be done of what is daily exposed to the public eye. An Opera may be compared to a complicated

machine, the effect of which depends entirely on the harmonic concurrence of all its parts to the same purpose: if the least spring loses its elasticity, if the smallest wheel receives the slightest collision on its pivot, the machine stops of itself; in the same manner, if the subject of an Opera is not well selected by the poet, if the composer does not adapt the music to the words, if the actor, whose province it is to express both words and music, does not carefully apply himself to sing and deliver with verity and propriety, if the ballet-master does not take the poet's sense to compose dances consistent with the poem, if the painter does not pay the strictest attention to the decoration of his scenes agreeable to the situation of places, times, and circumstances, if an intelligent taylor does not consult both the ancient and modern customs for the dresses of the actors; in short, if a skilful administrator does not hold all the strings of this machine with the greatest care, so as not to let a single one escape out of his directing hand, we must not wonder if the enchantment being once vanished, the Opera

which

which by its nature should be the most agreeable becomes the most tedious of all entertainments, and is branded with the disapprobation of every sensible being, and even of those who will but think on the subject.

A native of France may with reason entertain some prejudice in favour of his country. It is most true that France holds the first rank and has no rival in point of taste, elegancy, and grace: the consequence of this truth is the perfection of her theatres; but still with those prejudices it will be said and proved that London is the spot in the universe which may enjoy the best performances. Let the French be fond of their music, they are used to it; let them believe they have Italian music because their composers are Piccini, Sacchini, Gluck, who, to please the nation, compose French music agreeable to their taste, and within the power of their singers: still the Italian music will certainly be the first, and, it must be owned, the only one deserving that name.

This

This principle being generally admitted, cannot London boast of the best singers of Italy? Pacchierotti, Rubinelli, Roncaglia, and Marchesi, whom the English audience wanted and has enjoyed these two years past? For women have we not seen here the very best from Signora Gabrielli to Mrs. Mara.

I here cannot deny myself the pleasure of giving to Mrs. Billington, though belonging to another theatre, the justice she deserves; it would be a gross offence not to place her amongst the first talents now existing: and in the comic Opera there is not one talent of the first rate that has not passed on our stage. The ~~English~~ Italian Opera has then continually enjoyed the best music and best singers.

I shall say but one word of the execution of that music. London may have the best orchestra in the world; the oratorios of Westminster Abbey prove this assertion; that of the Opera is composed of musicians each of them excelling in his part; and has always

always had for leaders men of the first rank ----naming Giardini, Cramer, is making their eulogy.

There are, however, some instruments wanted, and absolutely necessary in so good an orchestra. Is it not extraordinary that Marchesi should have been obliged, last season, to leave a song of the most superb effect only for want of a clarinet to accompany his voice? There should be also trombes, small flutes, double bassoons, serpents, in short more instruments. Thus you see music and singing are here in the highest perfection.

I do not think very necessary to follow the ancient custom, and to bring over here one single composer, who is always very expensive to the administration, since we may have the works of many at a very reasonable price. During twelve years that I have been in London, and examined with attention the Opera in all its particulars, Sacchini alone has obtained a complete success, and still he has experienced great inconveniences

conveniences in the last moments of his stay. We were so much used to his abilities, so tired of his best works, that he was obliged to leave this country in the most abject circumstances. As for the others, Trajetta, Ansani, Giordani, Cherubini, their composition in this country has not certainly added to their reputation. If a composer's first Opera does not please, the prejudice will act upon the next; and having but one composer is sufficient to excite the desire of having others. It is then much better to let the Signori compose in Rome or Naples than in Suffolk-Street, and by a good correspondent all the Operas composed in Italy will be had with much less expence than what is given to one composer.

Some will perhaps oppose that the best and most successful Opera in Italy may not be convenient to the voice of the singers here; I shall answer, that the composers in Italy do not always know who will be the singers to perform their Opera: it will farther be said that these composers have the power to alter, according

cording to the singer's desire, the part which is not suitable to his voice; then it would be very easy to have here a good musician able to make those trifling alterations, and we should not be deprived of the most exquisite works, which are the glory and delight of all Italy; besides, we should be at liberty to chuse.

I have said that the Opera in London should and may be the first theatre in the world; I am confident that as to music and singing I shall have no contradicters.

I gave at once to the Italian music the preference over that of my country: I shall with the same confidence say that the academy for dancing is better in France than any where else. To support this truth I shall only name the first dancers in the world, who have represented on the theatre of the Haymarket. The two Vestris, Le Picq, D'auberval, Gardel, Nivelon, Didelot, and young Laborie who promises much; and of the other sex, from the majestic Heinel to the charming Hillisberg, all the dancers possessed

sessed of some reputation have desired and obtained the approbation of the English nation. Guimard, the pattern of all graces, was the only superior talent whom England long wished to know, and last year she received a tribute of deserved applause.

To mention Noverre for the ballet-master is certainly mentioning the first man for this kind of entertainment, which he created: he is the patriarch of dancing, as Voltaire was that of French literature.

From all this it is certain that the Opera in London has had all the most superior talents known in the various kinds of music and dancing.

By what fatality then is it possible that the Opera has been and is still a spectacle so detestable, so tedious, and I would say so disgusting, that the foreigners who daily come to this country do not scruple to place it beneath all other spectacles known? how? ..... by the want of a good admini-

administration. It is not certainly the fault of the performers, but it is most extraordinary that an union of talents of the first rate should produce a whole affording less pleasure than fatigue, less entertainment than ennui.

To bring the proper remedy to those inconveniencies, let us enter into some particulars on the objects mentioned in the beginning of this work; those objects are—

The choice of the subject.
The composition.
The singing and declamation.
The ballets.
The decorations.
The dresses.
The administrator.

The choice of the poem is questionless the most important object, and which we shall first take into consideration. The success of the drama depends entirely on that choice. Algarotti calls it the basis of the edifice, the canvas on which the painter has delineated

the picture which is to be coloured by the composer. This is the reason why the subjects of Operas were formerly selected out of Mythology, such as Daphné, Euridice, Ariadne by Ottanco Rinuccini; they are the first Italian poems set to music, and executed about the year 1600. Those dramas then were only performed at courts, and in the palaces of grandees for their marriages: they were ornamented with various machines, chorusses, dances, ballets mixed with chorusses, and other interludes, all consistent with the subject. Since then this kind of performance, given up to mercenary actors, could no longer subsist with so much apparatus and magnificence, the fabulous subjects were left aside, and those of history prevailed; the machines as two expensive were no more employed, and the interludes were filled up with ballets which had no kind of analogy with the poem, to which on the contrary they were most diametrically opposed. It can hardly be conceived how such a master-piece of nonsense could be so long put up with, and how such a capital offence against all probability and likelihood

lihood could be so repeatedly committed; but we are unhappy in saying that such is the true situation of the Italian opera in Italy as well as in England, and in all the countries where it has been transplanted.

In vain we would pretend to create a sudden revolution, and to change in a moment the state of stupor in which this kind of entertainment now languishes, for that of perfection to which it might ascend; such an alteration can be effected but by degrees; nay, was it possible to promote it as by a magician's wand, it is certain the vulgar would be displeased; men are so partial to their habits, that were they to change evil for good, still they could not bear the idea of such a sacrifice. But enough of men's errors, let us think of their pleasures.

The choice of the subject should therefore be highly important in that country where poets can manage various subjects; but on this stage confined to subjects already treated,

ed, where, all taste and choice being laid aside, the best works of Metastasius and of the greatest geniuses of Italy are cut to pieces; those subjects at least should be preferred which are most calculated for shew, and are intermixed with chorusses, battles, embarkations, feasts, conflagrations, and with all the charms of enchantment that a fiery imagination can produce---such as *Dido*, *Achilles in Seyros*, *Armida*, *Rolando*, *Eneas in Troy*, *Iphigenia in Aulide*, &c. &c. *Montezuma*, adapted to the stage with all its splendour, might cause a most grand effect; in it might be profusely shewn whatever extraordinary and magnificent America can boast, and a comparison be made with Europe.

I shall not undertake to prove how necessary it is for the musician to compose a music consistent with the words; it would be useless to hope for a success in that enterprize; to come to that perfection, is of all probabilities the most improbable. Metastatius was used to say, "I believed the mu-
"sic of an Opera was to be submitted to the
"poetry

" poetry, but I perceive it is the poetry " that is to be submitted to the music." This opinion of a great genius should at least prove the necessity of making them agree, walk hand in hand, and be sisters, and not rivals. The part of Music is to prepare the soul to receive the impression of verse, to create emotions suitable to the special and positive ideas expressed by the poet, and to add a new force and energy to the language of the Muses.

But music in our days is far from producing such effects; it is become as was formerly said *effeminata, & impudicis modis fracta.* Observing men say, and not without reason, that it is absurd a dramatis persona should die with a song. This most just censure arises from the want of harmony between the singing and the words: if the song which precedes the death or stabbing of a hero, or of a princess, was not overloaded with quavers, arpegiaturas, cadences, &c. &c. it would not appear more ridiculous to expire with a song than delivering verses. But one would think our present composers contrive

contrive without shame to break through all probability, especially in those Operas called serious, which might be with more propriety called ridiculous, for the absurdity of the composition.

A learned author has said, in the preface of the Encyclopedia, "all music which does "not paint is nothing but sound; and, was "it not for habit which changes the na-"ture of every thing, it would afford but "little more pleasure than a series of har-"monious and sonorous words bereft of or-"der and reason."

This assertion being founded on truth, we might ask that part of an audience who sometimes will give themselves the trouble of considering with attention, what real pleasure they experience at the representation of a pretended serious Italian Opera. Sometimes indeed they meet with fine verses, but so ill pronounced by the best singers, that, without the book, those who understand better Italian, can scarcely follow the sense of the poem; one would even think that

that this defect in pronunciation, this affectation of smothering the final syllable of the words, is become a rule, a principle, since it is the method of the first singers in Italy, who have adopted this method for their imitators to follow, and teach it to their pupils; so that the new school, which styles itself the best, gives it for a first rule that the words of a song are to be pronounced so as not to be understood; but we will observe to the new school that a declamation which to be intelligible requires the assistance of reading, is not unlike those pictures mentioned by Salvini, at the bottom of which they were obliged to write, *this is a dog*, and *this is a horse*. I maintain, that if that experiment was made to perform an Opera without words, seven eighths of the audience would not perceive it, and the rest would not lament the loss.

The music of an Opera may be divided into two parts, the recitative, and the songs, in which last class may be reckoned the duetto, trios, quartetto, &c. &c.

The recitative is the bastard offspring of decla-

declamation and singing, but still as it is, it cannot be called their natural child; it is a tedious and aukward psalmody inconsistent with both, fit but to contradict the feelings and annihilate attention, having no life, no soul, inspiring and impressing nothing; but it is a justice to say, in favor of the Italians, that they never pay any attention to it.

I hope I shall not be thought to have meant here that beautiful accompanied recitative, in which may be found all the expression of the Italian music: under this the frightened Muse looks for shelter, and seeks protection against the variations which pursue, torture, and kill her in the songs. This recitative, called *recitativo obligato*, has preserved to our days, and transmits to us, now and then, the remains of that heavenly music which had its origin in Italy, but the charming simplicity of which is now smothered and annihilated under the weight of numberless and most tiresome ornaments.

Supported by the opinion of a great author, I believe the true theatrical music may be

be found only in comic Operas. Have those Operas called serious brought into reputation Sacchini, Paesiello, Sacchini, Sarti, Cimarosa, and the greatest composers of our age? Has ever any serious Opera, with all the powers of the best singers in Italy, as Marchesi, Pacchierotti, Rubinelli, been received with the same enthusiam as *La frescatana, Gli Schiavi per amore?* Who would compare the modern music with the *chefs d'œuvre* of Pergolesi, Gasparini, Scarletti; with those ravishing cantatas by Timotheo, and *la Cassandra*, by Marcello; in which that immortal genius has displayed all the power of music: there we find the severity of the ancient composition united with the graces and charms of the new; but those graces he has made decent and becoming.

And in our days some modern composers have most exquisitely imitated their immortal precursors. What is more delightful than the third act of *Didone* by Vinci? From this verse, *Va crescendo il mio tormento*, to the end, all the recitatives are accompanied. Why is not that admirable idea imitated?

There would be less disproportion between the measure of the recitatives and that of the songs. Likewise those long and tedious ritornellos should be suppressed, during which, a personage worked by the most violent passion has time enough to walk two or three times round the stage, before he can give vent to his rage or despair. The song always terminates each scene, and the dramatis persona is never to leave the stage but when he has executed it. If enemies were murdering his father, he cannot fly to his assistance before he has submitted to this law, he must give the song, and cannot leave out one single repetition. Merope accused before the states of the kingdom to have poisoned her husband, answers with a song and exit. Artaban gives his son the bloody sword, with which he has just murdered the king: the young man should fly with the greatest hurry, but he executes a song full of quavers and cadences.

Examples of this kind, in the best Operas, are numberless.

When-

Whenever I am present at those master-pieces of stupidity, I cannot but wonder how in this 18th century, wherein human genius and the arts it has produced, are come to a degree of superiority which distinguishes it from all other ages; at this epoch of glory for human inventions, all Europe can be contented and entertained by an Italian serious Opera.

Italy is certainly the cradle of the arts; to that country and to the Medicis we are indebted for their regeneration. There they arrived to the highest pitch of perfection: but, alas! men would do more. I think perfection may be compared to a steep mountain, with all the obstacles that can make its access difficult. This mountain ends in a sharp point. The happy genius which has overcome all the difficulties, and through fatigues and labours at last arrives to the top of that point, if he goes one step further, falls for ever: and so it has been with the arts in Italy. Poets, painters, sculptors, musicians, were come to that point so difficult to attain, they would advance that step more.

more. They are fallen! Their poets are but improvisators; their painters, decorators; and their singers, fidlers.

But I have deviated from my plan. My design is to add to the entertainment, I will not say of my countrymen, I am a cosmopolite, but of my fellow-creatures, of men in general; and, I am happy to believe, that they will think themselves under some obligation, if I assist them in making some new discoveries in the road to *pleasure*. Life is so short, why should mortals pass away some parts of it with ennui, they are unhappy moments; and I maintain that mankind would be much more indebted to the vanquisher of that cruel monster *ennui*, than to all the conquerors in the universe, past, present, and future.

To obtain a leaf of that laurel, let us endeavour to prove that the Opera might afford entertainment.

We have dwelt on the choice of the subject, we could expatiate on the music, but on

on this head habits are too strong, we must leave the business to time; men will be tired with seeing victims of the most detestable avarice sacrificed on the altar of pleasure, and will be at last disgusted with disgustful things: . . . . . let us speak of Dancing.

A famous philosopher said, that dancing should be an imitation of nature, and of the affections of the soul, by the motions of the body; but where lies the imitation of nature or of the affections of the soul, in those repeated entrechats, in those continual whirlings, with which our modern dance is filled, so as to fatigue even the lovers of this manner? If perfection consists in rising higher, in crossing many times more the entrechat, and in more repeated turns in the whirling, then dancing is nothing but a compound of experiments of strength; and in this case, I prefer the Little Devil at Sadler's Wells, and young Astley, because they join graces, elegance, and dexterity, to strength, and overcome difficulty: but the fault is not in the dancers; it is but natural for a man, who wishes

wishes to be superior in his profession, to study with attention what pleases the taste of the spectators; and if he perceives that six turnings in a whirling are admired and received with loud applause, he will not think himself superior to all his competitors: but when he has attained the power of making eight, he will not care for any thing, study any thing but that stupid difficulty; and if he is so unhappy as to conquer it, he will give place to it every time, and upon every occasion. This has, in my opinion, made young Vestris less agreeable; this is the reason why I will always prefer his father to him, and often Le Picq, especially in the chacoon and heroic dance. But we must own, that when he consents to employ the most extraordinary power which nature has endowed him with, for the dance called *Demicharacter*, in those delicious ballets invented by Noverre, which he has most justly called anacreontic ballets, and which alone deserve the name of dances; then he is exactly what he represents, then we find in him united the most graceful exactness, the most expressive simplicity, the most extraordinary

traordinary strength, and the most correct agility: there he is truly charming, and to him may be justly applied this verse of the French immortal poet,

Rasant la terre & ne la foulant pas.

He slightly passes on the earth, and does not press upon its surface. But when I see him thrusting his head in a high-feathered helmet, when I see him taking a leap from one end of the stage to the other, to exhibit a collection of entrechats, a series of gargouillades, and an encyclopoedia of whirlings, so as to make my head turn round, then I cannot help exclaiming, oh! what an ill use of talents! and what a pity it is that such great powers should be employed to so little an effect! and when at the end of a chacoon, I see him seizing the crescendo, and executing with his feet as many steps as the instrument executes notes, I cannot but confess that it is exceedingly wonderful; but still it brings continually in my memory the dancing of a poor fellow, whom sometimes I have seen in the streets, executing a great quantity of little steps in a small compass

pass, wherein he has previously placed a dozen of eggs, none of which he breaks; and I must say that I am obliged to give the preference to the latter, because if I fear, or wish to see one of the eggs broken, then I feel an interest which the end of a chacoon cannot inspire.

O, you juvenile dancers, let Vestris be your model; but if you can attain that perfection, do not abuse of your talents; and ye, O youthful pupils of Terpsicore, endeavour to unite the force of Perignon, the graceful charms of Guimard, the chearfulness and agility of Theodore d'Auberval; imitate Hillisberg, who follow closely on their steps, and you will attain perfection.

I have expressed in the beginning of this work my desire of seeing the dances consistent with the poems of the Operas; I follow this idea, and insist on the choice of a subject, which may afford designs of every description, to diversify the most agreeable dances.

Heaven

Heaven forbid I should condemn those superb Pantomimical dances, called Ballets d'Action; for this new kind of entertainment we are indebted to Noverre: his pupils, d'Auberval, Gardel, have certainly executed very fine things, but to him they owe their glory; and when Noverre quits the field, d'Auberval will take his place, and be the only genius qualified to fill it properly, and, perhaps, to make one step more in the career; for we must confess Noverre, to whom we cannot deny the merit of having invented a manner entirely lost since the days of Pylades and Batyllus, Noverre, whose name will go to posterity with those of the two famous Mimes, who by their talents divided Rome in two parties during the reign of Augustus; Noverre, in short, has not been equally successful in the choice of his subjects: few of his works have equalled the sublimity of Medea, the graceful elegancy of Apelles and Campaspe, the variety and illusion of his Chinese ballet, the chearfulness and beauty of his charming *Petits Riens*; but he was mistaken when he made choice of the Danaides, when he contrived

to translate into dance the Horatii, by Corneille. That most famous *Qu'il mourut!* (that he died!) could not be expressed by all the art of Pantomime and coregraphy. What shall we say of that ballet, called Euthime and Eucharis, in which a ghost, armed cap-a-pee in grey satin, his face well dipped in flour, dances a pas de deux, ending with a wrestling, wherein he is defeated by his antagonist, who throws him down, and boldly stamps his foot on his stomach? . . . Oh Noverre! . . was I not afraid of being guilty of a little solecism in prosody, I would say,

Aliquando bonus dormitat Noverrus.

It will be sufficient to mention the success of the Deserter, by d'Auberval, to prove what could be done by the judicious choice of a subject. Few ballets have made so much impression; first, because it was understood by every spectator; and from the skill of the author, and the care he has taken to diversify the situations, to lead the soul of his spectators in the various sensations that could move it; to mix with the greatest art

the

the scenes of pantomime with those of dancing; to make a delicious selection of music; to employ all the power of scenery and decorations; in short, to charm equally the eye, ear, mind, and soul, and to create the same portion of affection in every individual. And we all agree that to create affection ought to be the first motive of all performances.

I should wish then that all Operas were terminated by a ballet d'action, which should be as the interlude of the performance. Instead of those tedious dances, called Divertissements, having no object, made coldly to precede the pas seuls, which also have no kind of cause or purpose, the whole ending with a general dance, in which all the dancers, first and last, join to make a vast number of whirligigs, and at last form an attitude over which it is very reasonable to let down the curtain, I should wish that the ballet-master should place dances consistent with the subject of the poem, and have a care to change the dancers, and be sparing of their talents, and of the public's pleasure in

in enjoying of them. In this it is certain a particular care should be taken; it requires no little taste to manage it; for if Vestris himself, who would not be averse to it, was to dance in four ballets of an Opera, he would grow tiresome in the last: but, by a well regulated exposition of the talents of the company, they might appear to the best advantage, every one would be pleased, the spectators go away satisfied to have given a just applause, and the actors to have deserved it.

The decorations are certainly one of the most important means of administration; they are the first objects on which the eyes are imperiously attracted; they create, in most part, that enchantment by which the spectator is transported into Greece or Egypt, into the Elysian fields, or to the Olympus. The genius of the painter ought to be guided by erudition, and a judicious understanding; and it is to be lamented that we should have so often reasons to complain for the want of probability, even with the assistance of perspective. It is true that the benevolence

nevolence of the spectators, or their indifference, prevents them from taking any notice of those defects. I do affirm, that there is not one Opera performed, but in which will be found the most ridiculous improbabilities, and the most gross absurdities. I have seen in *Didone abbandonata* the public place of Carthage ornamented with Gothic architecture, generally a great quantity of guns and shots in the Roman Camps, the well known S. P. Q. R. in the ballet of the Deserter; and in the Opera of that name, performed last year, the first scene was to be in the house of a merchant-woman of Leipsick, and the stage represented a magnificent decoration of columns of lapis lazuli enriched with gold, which some days before had formed the temple of Venus in the ballet of Psyche: a thousand other things more and more ridiculous are daily commited on the stage, with an impunity that threatens their continuation; such as prisons open on all sides, bridges over a dry ground, a river without a bed, a throne which two livery-servants bring for the audience of a Roman Emperor; that common throne which

serves

serves for all the sovereigns of the different quarters of the world, from the flood down to our days; and those benches of grass elegantly stuffed with roses and rose-trees, those heavy stone seats easily carried by a man, to give a princess the faculty of singing in a dream a song of two hundred bars. I have seen a high-priest taking under his arm an ox designed for a sacrifice, which painted, as it was, on pasteboard, did at a distance and by the side of the altar look a pretty good figure, but by misfortune the high-priest happened to turn round and destroyed a little the illusion. I have seen a Grecian camp on the sea shore in the Opera of Iphigenia, a new manager wanting to signalize himself and to set forth his theatrical knowledge: this camp seemed to him a very favourable occasion; a bright and standing moon told that the scene was night, in spite of the line of Argant's patent lamps, which by mistake had not been let down, and gave the moon the direct lie. The rollers, covered with green paper to represent the waves, were motionless, to express that fatal calm which engaged Calchas to make

Agamem-

Agamemnon a parricide. To express better the calm and the silence of the night, rather too much illuminated, the manager thought proper to place groups of soldiers asleep, stretched, for the sake of perspective, naturally on the ground; if they had been asleep in their tents, there would have been no prospect: but as more soldiers than usual had been hired, there were more than the stage could hold; one of them, in a hurry to group himself, before the curtain was drawn up, thought it fit to pass over a small board belonging to the decoration, which was across the stage, and represented the shore, and made no difficulty to lay himself down in the sea; and to sleep as he had been ordered, he rested his head upon a wave that was behind. Till then every thing was going on well, but when the gods were reconciled, the calm ceased, and the waves began to roll, the poor Greek received from his pillow a violent blow, which stunned him in such a manner that, in the moment of the embarkation which took place immediately after, when the Greeks were all on board the ships to sail for Troy, a voice cried from behind

hind the scenes, *take up the board, take up the board,* (which has been used for the embarkation) the Greek seeing no other board but that which on the other side represented the sea shore, made no difficulty to take the bank under his arms, and to follow the fleet on foot.

It were endless to mention all the instances of this theatrical anarchy; some will say they are trifles, which nobody takes any notice of, and I shall answer so much the worse; those particulars called trifles, when they are well observed, are part of the perfection of the performance; and if the spectators were once used to them, they would soon perceive the want of them, and their indifference on that head is the greatest proof of their being but little affected by the representation.

I know it is not to be affected that the fair sex and their admirers come to the Opera; I know that in the former the pleasure of being seen, and in the latter that of seeing, and in both the desire of meeting where

where they are sure to see a numerous assembly, are the most powerful motives which lead them to the Opera: besides, it passes for granted that Marchesi is the best singer of Italy, and Vestris the first dancer in the world; and this opinion is enough for many people. When the pleasure of the table is over, towards nine or ten o'clock, they come to applaud a song or a ballet, and sometimes one passes unheard, and the other unseen. The evening is spent in the coffee-room, with that common topic of conversation, politics and horses, there they wait till the end of the Opera brings the whole of the polite company. Now this is the happy instant of delight, the greater is the crowd the happier is the assembly; and though may be heard from every quarter complaints on the uncomfortableness of the place, *how hot it is! shocking indeed! monstrous!* still this is the only moment the charming figures of the handsomest women in the world re-assume their grace and amability, faded and destroyed by the tedious loathsomeness of the performance; it is in that delightful coffee-room, which alone affords

the pleasure of the evening and can indemnify for three hours of fatigue and *ennui*, that gaiety and good humour takes the place of dulness, that minds are delighted, hearts affected, and therefore in the coffee-room only, enjoyment is to be found. It is, however, to be pitied that no other inference can be taken from this exposition, but that the most interesting moment of the Opera is when the curtain has been let down.

The article of dresses is not less important than that of decorations, and the taylor of the Opera should not be a mere working clothes-maker, it is absolutely indispensable that he should be acquainted with the most necessary things belonging to his profession; he must know a little of drawing, some of the ancient and modern customs, and especially he must be a man of taste. But as men of this description are seldom to be met with in that situation, it is at least necessary that the administrator should take upon himself those articles, to avoid the improbabilities and absurdities which are daily committed on the stage.

Indeed

Indeed we must confess, that few years hence they have been most shockingly repeated. Except two or three dresses made up without taste or grace for the first performers, all the rest is absolutely disgusting, and most clearly repugnant with the characters. One might imagine that it was purposely contrived to do exactly the contrary of what should be done. From the ideas, which a man a little acquainted with history may have conceived of Porus king of the Indies, who would have expected to see him in the Opera of *Alessandro nelle Indie*, performed last year, dressed with a robe of white satin striped with sky blue, and all over spread with small pink feathers. The reason of this nonsense is, that our imberbis Porus wished to be pretty, and certainly the rival of Alexander had no such pretension. Instances of this kind would be innumerable, and in the ballets, how shameful! since the first dancers have thought proper to dress like rope-dancers, the beauty and elegance of the groups would be intirely lost, if Noverre had not directed himself the dresses of the

the women, but the figurants are sometimes shockingly negligent. I have seen a ballet of Furies at Sadler's Wells, wherein the first dancers had red stockings on, and the figurants wore at least black stockings; and the same season I have seen, on the stage of the Haymarket, the dancers in the ballet of Psyche with white silk stockings and large silver buckles; I have seen Turks, who not to spoil their head-dress, kept their hair in bags or queues; which indeed made a great disparity with the turbans. The necessity of paying the greatest attention to all those particulars, leads me naturally to speak of the judicious choice of a good administrator: on him depends intirely the correctness of those things, to him alone the reproach is due when they are not carefully executed, as he alone is to be praised for the perfection of the performance, because without his inspection it cannot exist.

I must confess, that to meet with a good administrator is not a very easy thing: that place, to be filled in a distinguished manner,

ner, requires some endowments. A good administrator of an Opera must be a man of taste, and that taste must be sure and determined; not wanting the advice of others to fix his opinion. He must know music enough to judge of its effects, and especially of its effects when compared with those of the words; he must then understand the words, and therefore is obliged to know Italian; he must necessarily speak French and English fluently; it would not be useless, likewise, that he should be acquainted with the German language, since he should hold a correspondence with the best composers of instrumental music, who are all Germans. Thus he is almost obliged to be conversant with four languages; he must be perfectly acquainted with history, and especially Mythology, with the ancient and modern customs, not to abandon the dresses of the actors to an unintelligent taylor, as has been hitherto the case. He must understand painting and perspective, the effect of decorations and machines; and above all he must know theatrical effects, understand the scene, the design and rules of the theatre, to avoid those

repeated

repeated absurdities which are daily committed with the most astonishing impunity.

It should even be necessary that this person had so perfect a knowledge of declamation, and was so good an actor himself as to administer advices, which by the confidence that might be entertained of his superior abilities, should be received at least with patience, if not without submission; for, as it is generally known that of all beings agitated by human passions, comedians or performers are more than others addicted to that of vanity and self-love, and that even the most aukward amongst them is positively confident that his manner is the best. It is then requisite that the administrator should be possessed of an influence respectable enough to tell the actors *you do wrong, and this is the manner you ought to do.* But an administrator of this description will be very difficult to be met with; still it is impossible to have a good spectacle, if the chief is not possessed of all the above mentioned qualities.

But, first of all, we must think of building another Opera House. London must have an

an Opera. The late house having been burnt down seven months, I think it is a great pity that the finest part of the year has not been employed in the construction of an edifice so absolutely necessary to the entertainment of this gay metropolis. From the very moment this accident happened 400 people should have been constantly at work, and they would have prepared a new house ready to open when Marchesi and Mrs. Mara will be in London. If the walls of an Opera House could raise themselves like those of Thebes by the delightful tunes of Amphion's lyre, indeed the arrival of those famous singers might have been expected, or in the while Mrs. Krumpholz's all-seducing harp might have been tried; but, alas! the time of miracles is no more, and such is our misfortune, that for building we must have money, masons, and materials: with the former we shall soon have the two others.

This delay in the construction of an Opera House supposes great difficulties; why should not we try to overcome them? I think that

that person should be entitled to some obligations who would find or even seek the most speedy and convenient means to obtain it.

In order to succeed and be just, every property must be respected, the various interest must be considered, and far from repeating what has been said by some, "The Opera "is destroyed, the prosecutions are at an "end, let us now think of building an- "other, let us erect a new temple of plea- "sure over the ruins of that edifice, the "hope and fortune of the unfortunate suf- "ferers, who by their tears would fain ex- "tinguish its still burning ashes," I will say on the contrary, nobody must be injured, and every body must be pleased if possible. And who is to be pleased?

The public, the subscribers, the creditors, and the proprietors.

I should indeed have named first the most gracious Sovereign of this happy land; but his justice, his kindness, will be satisfied with his people's contentment.

Let

Let us then begin with the public. Give them *panem & circenses*, give them good entertainments, excite their curious desires by frequently exposing new things to their view, and you will see them coming by crowds. Have commodious seats; pay as much attention to to the last places as to the first: submit your own interest to the ease of your audience, and you will not lose by it. Design for their use a row of boxes; let this row be the most elevated in the house, that the price may be within reach. Those boxes should be thirty in number, and of four seats each, to be had every performance day, at the rate of five shillings the seat, or one guinea for the whole box; but they should not be let by subscription for the season, because they would not then answer the right purpose, which is to have them kept for the honest and quiet citizen, who would be willing to hire them each Opera-night, and would by this means be sure to find himself commodiously seated at the moderate price of one guinea, and not run the danger of being squeezed to death, or having his pockets picked to ob-

tain the first rows in the galleries. Then the entry should be commodious and comfortable; the door designed for hackney-coaches must be of an access as easy as the portico for the most elegant carriages. Is an humble citizen and all his family to endure the inclemency of the weather because they have not a couple of brisk and gay horses, nor a brutish coachman to cut them with his whip, and who to come first will make no difficulty to run over every surrounding object: in short, let the individuals find their ease and pleasure, and depend upon it you will be amply repaid.

The subscribers are, for the most part, people of the first rank, and it is not to be supposed that this selection of the best company in London will take the trouble of shewing marks of disapprobation and discontent for trifles which, however, should be animadverted and altered for the sake of perfection. Marks of discontent never come from the boxes or the pit, unless the offence is so shocking as to draw a general damnation. There is no audience in London, nor

in

in any other country, so accustomed to benignity, kindness, and benevolence, as that of the Opera. John Bull in the other playhouses is by no means so enduring, though equally good, when nothing displeases him too much: the cause of his severity there, is in proportion with the attention he pays to the play; he comes to be entertained, and is pleased only when he is entertained, and especially when the engagement made by the bill of the play is faithfully discharged. But the subscribers to the Opera are not merely attracted by the hope of finding entertainment in the play; and that is the reason why they are not so difficult to be pleased: how much more will they give testimonies of their approbation when endeavours will be made to please them? Let the boxes then be commodious and roomy; set the ladies in full and open view; the house should be well illuminated, and in a manner as not to hinder the sight of any body, or give the female part of the audience an occasion of burning a fan every night to put out the candles, which otherwise would most offensively dazzle their eyes. The corridors must

must be spacious, the stair-cases wide, and the steps low; to all these conveniences if you add a most superb and magnificent room for the assembly to meet after the Opera, you will have attained the first means to please English subscribers.

For we must not think that the best architects in the world, such as Palladio, Vitruve, Bernini, would meet with the greatest success in building an Opera House in London. Whoever will undertake it must submit his ideas to the national taste: it would not be enough to execute with correctness the finest proportions, to display the most masterly knowledge of the rules of architecture, and even to possess a particular power to join magnificence with elegancy and taste in general. I maintain that the architect must know the taste of the nation, and be extremely careful how to please that taste. Let us suppose it has been thought necessary to call over the famous Fontanesi; you would see him arrive full of his principles, most confidently persuaded that the theatres of Vicenza, Florence, and Naples, are

are the most perfect theatres in the world, and would do his utmost to conform his plan to those superb pieces of architecture; but it is a certain fact that the theatres of *La Pergola* or *St. Carlo* would not at all be agreeable in London.

It is not necessary then to invite over any architect; and indeed London contains architects of the greatest abilities, such as would do honour to all the nations in the world. Sir William Chambers, who built Somerset House, Mr. Wyatt, the Pantheon, Mr. Adams and Holland, who have executed several buildings of great magnificence, and amongst the foreigners who have been long settled in London, and are well acquainted with the manners and customs of the country, Messrs. Novoscielsky and Buonhomi. But at the same time let us take care not to give ourselves up to the indulgence of protection: an architect patronized will do but what he pleases, when and how he pleases. and will be paid as much as he pleases. On such an occasion as this, concurrency, the parent of emulation, must be admitted,

admitted, all the artists must be called; they shall present their model, engage themselves to execute it for the price they fix upon, to have it finished in a certain time, under a considerable penalty, and shall present a good security for the performance of all those conditions: then the model which shall be thought the best shall have the preference, and its execution be entrusted to its author on the above said conditions.

We have hitherto treated the moral part of the Opera, which is entertainment and pleasure, let us now come to its physical part, *Money*, and the ways and means to obtain it.

The creditors and the proprietor ought to form one single article; the one is essentially connected with the other, and their interest is the same.

It is not necessary to the purpose of this publication to state all the different hands through which the property of the Opera House has passed, nor the manner in which they

they have respectively conduced it; my object being more to shew how the entertainments of the Italian Opera may in future be carried on with splendor in themselves, and advantage to the interests of the theatre, than to set forth how they have been managed in times past; and it is here the less necessary to enter in such a narrative, since the proprietor himself has lately stated a case extremely interesting upon the subject. One thing, however, is very certain, that the business of the opera has always been upon too narrow a scale, insomuch that there were not attractions sufficient to raise the receipts to the amount of the expences; hence deficiences have frequently arisen in the annual disbursements of the theatre; to which are to be added occasional alterations, improvements in the house itself, and very great additions to the wardrobe, scenery, &c. all which, put together, have left incumbrances upon the property of this undertaking, which may be divided into the separate classes of mortgagees, renters, and simple debts.

Under

Under the first are to be ranked Mr. Gallini, the principal, together with twenty-four shares of 500l. each, the whole making about the amount of 2,000l. of principal, for I do not speak of interest in this case.

Of renters there are about seventy; they are a species of annuitants of 20l. each, with the privilege of admission for a term of years, of which eight or nine are yet to run. The admission of this number of persons in a theatre of such extent as this is far from being hurtful to the property; on the contrary it may rather be esteemed attractive.

The simple contract debts consist in tradesmen's bills, and parts of salaries of performers, musicians, in the whole not exceeding (as I am well assured) 16,000l.

To those sums is to be added 8,000l. due to the trustees of the creditors, occasioned in the years 1783, 1784, and 1785; so that the whole of the incumbrances upon the Opera House are, at least, one third less than they have been

been estimated at by public opinion, being altogether about 48,000l. towards which there are 8,000l. insured, and probably about 9,000l. of profits under Mr. Gallini's management, so that these two sums taken from 48,000l. leave only 32,000l. of an incumbrance upon a new building; and certainly within the scale of complete liquidation in a very few years from the accruing profits, if the establishment of this entertainment is put upon that footing on which it may and ought to be placed.

From all this we see that with the sum of 32,000l. all the debts of the Opera may be paid, and every creditor satisfied.

But money will be wanted to build a new theatre; let us see for the means to obtain it from persons who, clearly seeing good securities, will make no difficulty to lend.

I employed part of the summer to build various plans, and especially the model of a building designed for the Opera. Many persons of the first rank in this kingdom

have done me the honour to view it, and I presume to say that every body has been pleased; I invite the subscribers to come and judge for themselves, and I shall receive their opinion with gratitude.

This plan I executed consistent with the opinion I have conceived, that London is undoubtedly of all the cities in the world the more abounding in resources, and consequently affording means in a greater quantity to reunite the best productions in Europe of all kinds; and, to prove beyond a doubt that this assertion is founded on truth, few reflections will serve as the ground of my opinion.

I maintain that London contains a great quantity of people of fortune, who spend the time between the two birth-days of their Majesties, from the 17th of January to the 4th of June, with the design and power to gratify all their pleasures. There will be no exaggeration in saying that 20,000 people would be very glad to spend six days in the week at some pleasing entertainment, provided

vided the expence does not amount to more than one half guinea every evening. The thing is then to attract that half a guinea by offering to its owner an allurement, which may induce him to spend it without ever lamenting its loss. From the 17th of January to the 4th of June, we reckon one hundred and twenty days which may be spent in pleasures, (Sundays excepted, which are not in this country the most entertaining days in the year) and will bring 60 guineas; now I repeat it, there are above 20,000 people in London who would be very glad, and can afford to spend 60 guineas every season to be entertained six nights in the week, and that number of people to entertain will produce 10,000 guineas every night. Oh, what an immense resource! Is there a city in the world which can afford as much?

Relying on the attraction of those half guineas I have executed my model, so as to have in the same building various kinds of entertainments. Behind the theatre is a magnificent room of one hundred feet in length and seventy in width, which, besides the means

means and advantages it procures for adding to the majesty of the Opera, may be specially adapted for routs, concerts, balls, &c. which will take up some days in the week, besides those designed for Operas.

From the most exact calculations I value the expences of that building to the sum of 60,000 pounds. To raise that money the matter is to propose an allurement, as well as securities sufficient to induce the subscribers to advance their money.

It is certain, when this plan has received his Majesty's sanction, that subscribers enough will be eager to obtain boxes, and on that eagerness I rely for the necessary resources.

When the late house was built it was likewise the production of many friends, who subscribed fifty thousand pounds to its establishment and construction.

Since then it is become more fashionable amongst people of rank to have boxes, I have,

have, therefore, endeavoured to find in my plan a form which might afford a greater quantity. I have found the possibility of making 250, but to have them more convenient and roomy I intend to reduce that number to 220, and then they will be perfectly agreeable and comfortable to their owners, being five feet in front and eight in height; but when I shew this regard for their conveniencies, I must expect they will be ready to lend me their assistance.

These are then my proposals :

The expences of the Opera, being much greater than they were thirty years ago, absolutely require that the ordinary subscriptions should be raised to 25 guineas instead of 20, but in return for that increase, the number of nights shall be 60 instead of 50.

I propose to sell 40 boxes of 4 seats each, to be chosen by those who will first subscribe for them, at the price of 1,000 guineas each,

each, and those boxes shall belong to the subscribers for the term of fourteen years.

The subscribers shall receive yearly four subscription tickets worth 100 guineas; 50 of which shall be for the interests at the rate of 5 per cent of the 1,000 guineas advanced; and the other 50 shall be as reimbursement, which will gradually and yearly lessen the interests and principal; so that both shall be paid at the expiration of 14 years by the following calculation.

The subscriber shall advance this year 1790 in three different payments, the first at the moment he subscribes, the second three months after, and the third six months after, the sum of 1,000 guineas, or - - - - l. 1050

At the beginning of the season one thousand seven hundred ninety-one, he shall receive four tickets for his box worth one hundred guineas,

Brought over - -		l.1050
guineas, or - -	l.105	
Of this sum it shall be deducted for the interests of the 1050l. at the rate of five per cent. - - - - -	l.52--10	
Remains - -	52--10	
This sum shall be the first account paid, and must be deducted from the princpal,		52---10
Remains of the principal after the first year - -		997---10

The same deductions shall be made for each of the thirteen years following, by giving every year to the subscriber four subscription tickets worth l.105, which shall complete the reimbursement of his principal and interests.

And for this advanced sum of money the box shall continually belong to him, his heirs and successors, or any other person or persons he will give it over to; on that condition,

dition, however, that the fourteen years being expired he shall pay one hundred guineas yearly for his four subscription tickets.

The 40 owners of those boxes thus subscribed for, shall be the first subscribers of the Opera; they shall have a free admission to all public entertainments which shall be performed in the house as benefits, masquerades, routs, and even concerts; in short to all entertainments of every description whatever, which shall take place in the house and receive money at the door; they will appoint a committee of four or six members, to whom it shall be yearly given an exact account of the annual receipts and expences of the Opera.

The first stock produced by this subscription will then be forty thousand guineas - - - - - - 40,000 G.

Which at the expiration of 14 years will be paid as it has been mentioned.

This

Brought over - 40,000 G.

This sum not being sufficient, we must call to our assistance other subscribers who will desire to have boxes.

The 40 boxes being chosen by the first subscribers, there will remain 180; we shall then invite each person, desirous to have a box in their name, to pay their own subscription before hand for four years, which will amount to one hundred guineas; and, as for those four years they will have nothing to pay for their admission ticket, they will thus find the payment of their advanced money.

Those hundred guineas for every box will produce

Brought over -	40,000 G.
the sum of - - - - -	18,000 G.

To give a proper idea of the total amount of the receipts for the first year, we shall join here the private subscriptions.

180 Boxes containing 3 seats each, that of the subscriber for 4 years not being included, at the rate of seventy-five guineas each box, will give thirteen thousand and five hundred guineas - -

75
900
1260
13500

13,500 guineas.

We may easily reckon the receipts at the door the first year. After the new plan the pit will hold 600 persons at half a guinea each,

71,500

Brought over	-	71,500 G.
each - - - - -	315 l.	
the 1st gallery 1000,		
at 5s. each - - -	250 l.	
the 2d gallery 500,		
at 3s. each - - -	75 l.	
	625 l.	

These six hundred and twenty-five pounds may be, without fear of any mistake, reduced to 250 guineas each night, and therefore 60 nights will bring - - 15,000 guineas.

86,500 guineas.

Which reduced into pounds will give - - - - - 90,825 l.

To this sum might be added the receipts produced by concerts, routs, balls, masquerades, &c. which certainly will come to a considerable amount; for in my plan I intend to keep constantly prepared, and

to

Brought over - 90,825 l.

to execute in 20 hours on the spot designed for the stage the same quantity of boxes as the rest of the house will hold, and to make these boxes as commodious as the others; the building will besides contain rooms for 2,000 people to set down at supper at the same time. I have no doubt but the attraction of such a spectacle, superior to what has ever been seen in any country in the world, will be of the greatest consequence for the welfare of the enterprize; but as it is impossible to have a certain idea of those receipts, we shall only set this article down for the very low sum of - - - 1,200 l.

Total amount - - 92,025 l.

We

We may then determine that the first season will most certainly and undoubtedly produce ninety-two thousand twenty-five pounds.

Let us now reckon the expences of that first season. The projected building we have announced will come to 60,000l. which for fear of mistake we shall raise to - - - - - - - - 65,000

The expences for the representation cannot exceed 20,000l. but as, the first season, new dresses and decorations will be wanted, we shall set down - - - 23,000

Total of the expences for the first season - - - 88,000

RE-

RECAPITULATION.

The receipts amount to - - -	92,025
The expences to - - - - -	88,000
Overplus for the receipts - -	l. 4,025

which sum will be more than sufficient to pay the interests of the debt, said to amount to thirty-two thousand pounds.

We must observe, that, after 4 years the subscribers to the 180 boxes being paid of the hundred guineas by them advanced, the subscription at this epoch will encrease to - - - 180

25

900

360

4,500

Which sum of four thousand five hundred guineas being added to the general subscription, amounting to 13,500

will make up the total of 18,000 guineas.

of

of yearly subscription, and that after the 14 years, the principal subscribers being paid of their 1000 guineas, the payment of their 40 boxes will give 4,000 guineas more every year, which will amount to the sum of 22,000 guineas of general subscription by the year - - 22,000guineas.

And this last sum being added to that of ten thousand guineas at least which will be received at the door 10,000 will make the general receipt amount yearly to thirty-two thousand guineas - - - - - - - 32,000 guineas.

And the expences being calculated to the utmost at - - - - - - - - - 22,000

There will be an overplus of receipt of - - 10,000 guineas.

for the proprietors; which overplus will certainly render every debt secure, and make the

the fortune of those concerned in the enterprize.

Just as this work is going to press, I understand that a patent is granted to build a new theatre on the ground of Leicester House in Leicester-Fields. If it is so, the proprietor and other parties concerned in the old Opera House may be perfectly easy; his Majesty's justice is too well known, that they should entertain the least uneasiness about their debts. It is further said, that Mr. Vanburgh and some other mortgagees have already been indemnified; then the rest may expect to be treated in the same manner; preferences in this case should be too hard for those who should experience none; but, I say it again with confidence, the parties concerned in the old Opera House may be perfectly easy; they may rely on his Majesty's bounty, much more on his justice and on that of his ministers.

I should

I should think, however, that the old ground in the Hay-Market should be more convenient in every point; I can say and maintain that the necessary expences to bring the theatre there, to the highest pitch of perfection, as to magnificence, convenience, utility, and facility of the access, will not, by far, amount to the sum which the theatre in Leicester-Fields will require; and as to advantages there will be no comparison between each other.

And I have my plan more at heart, since the choice of the situation has been approved by his Royal Highness the Prince of Wales. I humbly presume that the liberty I take to boast of his approbation will not incur his Royal Highness's displeasure; arts cannot but rejoice to find in the immediate successor to the crown the same protection they always experienced from his royal father: before his R. H. loved them he learnt how to judge of them; the distinguished manner in which he appreciates them, declares the extent of his understanding, the benevolence of his heart, in short foretels the uncommon and

precious qualities, by the possession of which the most amiable becomes the most beloved of princes.

However, I submit with respect my opinion to that of the persons who have the great hand over this part of administration. My ideas, my plans, my models, all I have done, and all I could do, I offer for nothing, without hopes of reward; my only desire is to be of some service to a country which I am so much indebted to, and to shew my gratitude for a nation which received me with so much kindness and benevolence. I say it again, in the sincerity of my heart, IF I CAN FLATTER MYSELF TO HAVE ADDED TO ITS PLEASURES I AM SATISFIED.

FINIS.